Panda meets Koala: A comparison of journalism education practices in China and Australia

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Abstract

In order to address the challenges of learning and teaching given the seismic changes in news consumption, production and the surfeit of information, this paper explores the trajectories of learning in journalism in two culturally different academic institutions: Xiamen University in China and Western Sydney University in Australia. This comparative research presents the new and innovative ways news and information gathering is taught while instilling good, ethical practice in future journalists and information gatherers. It explores the challenges facing both institutions and countries, in building a good journalism foundation through ethical research, use of authoritative sources, balance, fairness in reporting, writing and presenting news with accuracy and speed while targeting multimedia platforms for maximum reach to target audiences.

Cultivating storytelling abilities in students using scenarios, simulations, real-life situations, lived experiences, situational and mobile learning, is identified as a common approach to nurturing responsive and responsible journalism in both institutions. The paper outlines the methods that work and explores the opportunities as well as challenges these approaches present in understanding journalism and in delivering news while preparing students for the future of

work. The first part of the paper overviews journalism development in China and how the craft is taught at Xiamen University. The second part focuses briefly on Australian journalism history and the pressure and challenges the Fourth Estate faces in fulfilling its public interest role. It then outlines methods of engaged learning activities at Western Sydney University. The paper concludes by discussing the common meeting points of learning in a global and changing world where there will be greater need for journalists to present the truth in news through verification and fact-checking – common perennial foundations of the craft.

Introduction

Today, journalism faces significant changes resulting from media integration and news communication patterns. Journalism education, therefore, is also up against many major challenges. The most direct impact comes from the demand for updating knowledge and skills brought by the changes in communication technologies. While many countries are exploring and innovating their methods and models of journalism education, Xiamen University in China and Western Sydney University in Australia have begun to collaborate to share methods and approaches to teaching the important skills and knowledge required as vital attributes in an old profession which serves public good.

Journalism education in China adopted and imitated the American journalism model which aims at cultivating versatile talents and emphasizes practical learning methods in the initial stage (Changfeng, 2006; Junlin & Haihong, 2014; Xinxun, 2009). This has continued since China's reform and opening up with the introduction of Western theories on journalism and communication (Changfeng, 2006). In the 1980s, the influence of American journalism and communication education 'radiated the vitality of Chinese journalism education' (p.78). However, in the past decade which has seen changes in information technology and the development of integrated media as well as the unprecedented influence of globalisation, China is building a model of journalism education with more specific Chinese characteristics, including ideology, humanity, publicity and sociality (Luo Zhenglin, 2017).

In comparison, historically Australian journalism education was mainly carried out within news organisations themselves via industry-centered cadetships operating as a form of mentoring. During the 1980s which saw the beginning of the concentration of the media industry, the 'education' of journalists began to be 'professionalised' and training was transferred to colleges and universities. However, even within this setting, journalism education still maintained a strong sense of practice. The criticism of media from politicians and the public (Banning, 1999) paved the way for pre-professional programs for training of journalists. These programs have mostly focused on preparing students to develop a professional understanding of journalism practice for specific vocational writing and news gathering skills (Burns, 2018). Culturally, historically and socially, China and Australia are very different, and this is reflected also in the world of journalism. However, both face similar challenges in the global and national political economies where a profession founded on the 'need to know' is experiencing transformational changes in the face of growing competition from the masses who use new technologies to ply the journalists' craft. Using a

comparative case study approach, this paper compares the curricula and approaches in two major public universities in these two countries: Xiamen University and Western Sydney University. It focuses on the concepts and foundations of learning about news, where it comes from, how it is presented; and also understanding the value of storytelling in a multimedia world. Such skills and knowledge are presented as stepping-stones into the world of journalism practice and other fields of communication where journalism graduates find employment. The world of corporate communication also values many journalism attributes such as the ability to spot news in set information, package information and deliver to deadline in multimedia platforms to niche and identified audiences with accuracy and speed.

This paper first outlines the framework of journalism education in China and Australia from the macro and medium levels. It then provides a comparative analysis by discussing in detail the models and methods of journalism education in both universities at the micro level. In doing this level of comparison of teaching method, this paper presents some of the common aspirations of the journalism programs and their meeting points for similar goals and outcomes.

Journalism education in China: An historical overview of the guiding principles

The history of Chinese journalism education is generally aligned with several periods of development of Chinese media, mainly newspapers. The journalism course offered by professor Baohuang Xu of Peking University in 1918 was the beginning of higher education journalism teaching in China. Early Chinese journalism education mainly imitated American journalism education which aimed at cultivating practical journalism attributes and generalist knowledge (Changfeng, 2006; Lang & Yingxiao, 2013). After 1949, journalism education in China changed to model itself on that of the former Soviet Union (Shaogeng & Xingbo, 2019). During the period in which China reformed and started to open up to western journalism and communication ideas, its journalism education once again was influenced by ideas mainly from the United States (Zhenglin, 2017). Chinese journalism was learning from American and Soviet models, and constantly adopted its own journalism education models based on its own characteristics (Lu & Jiarui, 2020).

According to Zhenglin (2017), ideology became the most significant requirement of Chinese journalism education, and the Marxist view of journalism formed the foundation and premise of journalism education. At the same time, with the rapid development of new media technologies, the current guiding principles underpinning Chinese journalism education emphasises the cultivation of comprehensive quality and a humanistic spirit under the guidance of the Marxist journalism view and aims to cultivate interdisciplinary media production talents. Journalism education has therefore been given more attention and has in turn become an attractive pursuit for students.

An overview of the journalism education framework

The overall framework of journalism education in China focuses on the national vision and promotion of the development of journalism education, as well as the reform of the training program through a curriculum system that recognises journalistic talents. This approach aims to focus on the development of specific journalistic knowledge and skills.

In China, the State attaches great importance to journalism education in colleges and universities and a series of strategic plans and specific measures have been put in place to build first-class communication disciplines (Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee and the Ministry of Education, 2018). These focus on the return of the Marxist view of journalism, emphasising the need for journalism to embrace the principles of party spirit and affinity to the people. The State's investment in journalism education has also been greatly increased to allow universities to include developments in new media technologies and to incorporate changes in public opinion, news consumption and communication patterns. Various high-standard media practice platforms have been built in colleges and universities and the State has invested heavily in some key journalism and communication schools to build first-class journalism and communication disciplines to strengthen international competitiveness. The overarching aim is to strengthen the connection between journalism education and media units in colleges and universities, and to cultivate and integrate media talent.

During the reform of China's media system in the 1990s, a large number of market-oriented media flourished, and the media played an important role in engaging public opinion around all aspects of social and economic life. The growth of market demand has stimulated a growth of journalism majors in colleges and universities. According to Tingjun (2013), from 2000 to 2004, the number of journalism majors increased from 335 to 661 in 2006, with more than 150,000 students enrolled (p. 26). The Research Committee on the History of Journalism and Communication Education of the Chinese Association for History of Journalism and Mass Communication (2016) pointed out that there were 1244 journalism undergraduate schools in 2016, 230,000 undergraduate students and more than 7000 full-time teachers (p. 3).

In recent years, with the development of new media technology, the evolution of public opinion and changes in communication patterns, the government attaches great importance to the work of news and public opinion. University-level journalism education also appears to be particularly important to the State and this is manifested in the increasing investment in university journalism education. The Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee and the Ministry of Education say in a document (2018):

> … cultivate a large number of excellent reserve talents in journalism and communication who can adapt to the in-depth integration of media and the innovative development of the news industry, and can tell Chinese stories well and spread China's voice (p. 1).

This directive highlights the Marxist view of journalism by promoting the importance of first-class journalism education as one of its most important goals. This includes the construction of 240 national first-class professional journalism and communication disciplines, 500 national first-class professional courses of journalism and communication online and offline, 20 national journalism and communication media experimental teaching demonstration centres, and 50 national projects with 'virtual simulation experiment teaching' of journalism and communication (Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee & Ministry of Education, 2018).

In response, the first batch of national converged media experimental teaching demonstration centres of journalism and communication have been gradually constructed after years of effort, among these are the Communication University of China, Renmin University of China, Shanxi Normal University, Henan University, Anhui University and Yunnan University. A large number of provincial experimental teaching demonstration centres have also been designed to meet the needs of the new curriculum practice. At the beginning of 2019, the first batch of 10 national simulation laboratories were approved for construction.

UNIVERSITY	PROJECT NAME	PRINCIPAL
Chongqing University	Disaster event fusion reports virtual simulation experiments	Tiance Dong
Communication University of Zhejiang	Multi-channel guidance virtual simulation experiments	Yiliang Hu
Shandong University	Virtual simulation teaching project of "interactive drill of press release about multi-role playing"	Wang Ni
Shenzhen University	Virtual simulation experiment of production and broadcasting in integrated media studio	Xiaohua Wang
Hebei University of Economics and Business	Virtual simulation project of Fusion media news production process	Lei Yang
Hangzhou Dianzi University	VR experiment of corporate image advertising space experience and communication planning	Yigang Wang

Communication University of Shanxi	Virtual experimental teaching project of studio news camera technology	Weidong Guo
Communication University of China	Digital television studio technology	Jianbo Liu
Zhengzhou University	Media convergence training project based on big data technology	Suxia Zhen
Guangzhou Sport University	Virtual simulation system for live reports of sports events	Xiaodong Wang

Table 1. National Virtual Simulation Experiment Teaching Project (Journalism and Communication)
Source: (Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, 2019)

In addition to the funds provided by the Ministry of Education, co-construction between Ministry and Universities (CBMU is also one of the important ways for the State to invest in journalism education. This refers to the co-construction between the Propaganda Department of Provincial Party Committees and the journalism departments of major universities in the provinces. Shaogen and Xingbo (2019) point out the presence of more than 120 journalism institutions of CBMU nationwide by August 2018 (p.162). This strategy assists the construction of journalism disciplines in colleges and universities through fund injection, media resources sharing and the 'thousand talents plan'. The input includes funds for hardware, environment and equipment construction (such as media centres, media labs), project funds, curriculum construction funds, to name a few.

The sharing of major media resources in the provinces has also greatly broadened the channels and platforms for off-campus practice of journalism students. The 'thousand talents plan' refers to the recruitment of at least 1,000 elites each year from journalism departments of colleges and universities; and media organisations nationwide. Its purpose is to strengthen the communication and cooperation between journalism teaching in colleges and universities and the journalists working in industry. On the one hand, it allows media professionals to teach journalism practice in university classes, encouraging students to participate and practice formal news production processes as taught by these media professionals. On the other hand, journalism teachers can take up a post in a media unit. This allows them to directly participate in and observe current news production processes and to further understand and experience the development trend of the industry. They are able to gauge the current industry pulse, gain practical experience, and then feed this experience back to their journalism classes.

In 2015 and 2016, the author directly experienced the impact of this approach when Mr. Peng Zhao, a journalist who was then the director of the Interview Department of the People's Daily Fujian Branch, gave 10 lectures in her in-depth reporting course. Mr. Zhao is a veteran journalist who used case study teaching methods, combined with his own experience to guide students in understanding news gathering and operation techniques. He invited the students to participate in his news topic, discussed interview angles and provided feedback on students' stories. This provided practical training to the students and this practice is consistent with the national framework and target methods for China's journalism education.

Curriculum reform and training models

Journalism and communication education are facing unprecedented challenges as journalism schools and departments have tried to reform the talent training mode and curriculum system to meet the demand of journalism talent training under the new situation, including the introduction of new media-related courses and the construction of training target-oriented curriculum system.

The first-year university program is centered around developing liberal education (Changfeng, 2020). Students take up their specialization in journalism from second year. The '1+1' wide-calibre training mode of 'foreign language, economics, sociology, etc.' + 'journalism' has become the model used in most colleges and universities.

Some universities have gone further. The School of Journalism and Communication of Xiamen University focuses on international journalism education which is more important in the context of China's emphasis on strengthening international communication ability and telling Chinese stories well. The experimental class in international journalism begins from the second year, all students are selected from other majors in the university. The international journalism major requires bilingual teaching in Chinese and English. The core courses of the major are all taught in English. The course is integrated with a course taught by the School of International Relations of Xiamen University to cultivate students' literacy in international politics and international relations.

Students can freely choose other professional courses after completing the pre-qualification course and the core course of their major. This approach helps cultivate interdisciplinary talents, while accommodating students' personal interests. These training modes apply the training concepts of 'humanistic spirit', 'comprehensive quality' and 'compound' journalism talents (Changfeng, 2020). It is worth noting that most professional settings are still limited to the boundaries of media form, which is not conducive to the cultivation of integrated media talents and needs to be broken.

In order to adapt to the new media technology environment, the journalism department also continuously upgrades the existing curriculum by introducing new media-related courses, such as media technology, application of new media, data news, news visualisation, video production, visual communication, media fusion, VR, AR and other content to develop technical adaptability of students (Jianjie & Jinke,2020).

Xiamen University: The teaching experience

Journalism education at Xiamen University has the general character of Chinese journalism education and its own unique flavour. The approach to teaching is flexible and changeable. New teaching methods are constantly tried and applied. In the past, teaching was mostly confined to the classroom and based on theory. With more and more teachers with practical experience entering the teaching team, practical teaching methods have been gradually introduced. These include case teaching, flipped classroom, on-site teaching and practical teaching.

Case teaching has been used by the author in the 'Depth Reports' unit, especially in the research and analysis of journalistic works. In this unit, students are presented with depth reports on significant topics and are asked to review the angle of story, sources of information, interview content, important background information, writing method and styles. They are asked to present their own approaches to presenting such reports. How would they conduct the research, interview and present the story? The teacher guides the learning process and students are expected to present their own solutions to any difficulties they may encounter.

Using case analysis and class discussion, students can more intuitively understand the relevant knowledge points and operational ideas of an in-depth report topic, and then imitate this approach when they conduct their own journalistic reporting. Case teaching method is widely used in journalism practice teaching in China and teachers strive to accumulate cases and create a unified teaching case base for each course (Lingling & Ling, 2017).

The flipped class model is the most important learning model which changes the roles of teachers and students by transferring to the student the dominant learning practices. The teacher arranges the learning tasks of each class according to the course schedule, selects the reading materials, and provides the main knowledge points to the students by recording them into video or PowerPoint slides in advance. Students study independently before class, and the class time is used to sort out the course content system and the key knowledge. More time is spent by the teacher answering questions and coaching students on their tasks, especially one-by-one coaching. The assessment in the journalism practice course requires students to complete tasks based on specified topics, and students need individual guidance from teachers most of the time. The flipped classroom model is therefore particularly important (Jie, 2020).

The on-site teaching method is also widely used and involves visits to media organizations to learn about the news content production processes. Teachers take students to the news scene, discuss the issue at the scene and guide them to interview and write their stories. Professor Li Xiguang of Tsinghua University, is one of the earliest teachers in China to adopt the on-site teaching method. Professor Li, who is from *Xinhua News Agency*, has had a long and distinguished career in journalism. After he started teaching, he carried out a major reform to the course 'News Interview and Writing'. The whole course revolves around the core question of journalism 'where is the story?' and

teaches students the basic concepts, principles, and methods of finding and writing stories (Xiguang, 2011). He has introduced the idea of 'learning on the road'. Since 1999, Professor Li has promoted the journalism 'caravan course' and has taken students around China and the world including Russia and the Asian rim including central, southeast and northeast Asia and other regions (Xiguang, 2003). Li's teaching model was named New Journalism Education (Wang Ping, 2005).

The teachers at Xiamen University also have the tradition of on-site teaching. Most of time they conduct on-site teaching locally, sometimes they take students to other places. A few years ago, my colleague Professor Cao took his students to a beautiful village in northern Fujian to interview local villagers. My 'In-Depth Report' course also guarantees that each semester students will go out of the school to conduct interviews in Fujian. For example, in 2015, we targeted poverty alleviation in Ningde Chixi, Fujian. In 2016, we covered Jinjiang City, the leader of China's private economy. Initially, students and I discussed and determined the topic, and students researched and collected information on their topic before departure. After arriving, they spent two or three days on interviewing. In the end, the students completed their own news reporting tasks.

Field teaching is another kind of practical teaching. The assessment in the journalism practice course requires that students produce the news report works according to the course design rather than just apply purely theoretical knowledge. For example, the Interview and Writing course requires students to complete certain interview tasks and write news reports. 'Integrated Media News' requires interviewing, writing, videography or photography and producing different news according to the needs of integrated media. These tasks require students to directly exercise their relevant abilities through hands-on operation.

In addition to collecting information, completing interviews and filming tasks in groups or independently, students also spend a lot of time in the laboratory or media center familiarising themselves with various media software, and completing course tasks using appropriate technologies and software. Different courses have different tasks and different training skills allowing students to improve their range of journalistic skills.

Journalism education in China: Task-oriented content and assessment

According to the course content and task requirements, teachers design the key points, and the corresponding knowledge points and overall ability requirements are examined in the course assessment. Therefore, the assessment method is no longer the examination of pure knowledge points, but rather an assessment of the overall ability requirements, and the examination of students' understanding and practical application ability of each knowledge point in the specific process of task implementation. For example, in the 'Interview and Writing' course, students may be assigned several interview tasks of different topics. Another example is the design of the 'In-Depth Report' class, which aims to cultivate students' ability to carry out an in-depth journalistic investigation. The assessment task is divided into three parts: first, to analyse at least 10 excellent in-depth reports; second, to complete a profile (1500 words) to

evaluate the students' ability to observe and interview, provide details, describe and reproduce them; third to complete an in-depth report (5000 words). The course broadly tests the students' ability to select appropriate topics, interview sources, analyse complex issues, collect, sort and control information as well as write clearly and accurately. These task-oriented course designs guide students in the practice of journalism. In the process of carrying out these tasks, students constantly experience and verify relevant knowledge points, methods and skills. The comprehensive practical training and practice system enables students to complete the standard news production process and integrated media training at the university level, and students can quickly adapt to the requirements of journalism when they graduate.

Journalism education in China: Students practice training

The importance of practical journalism education in the whole process of training omni-media talents has been paid increasing attention. Without practice, pure theoretical learning is far from enough for applied journalism. As an important part of talents training, journalism practice-based education fuses with media talents training. Most universities attach great importance to students' practice and training and build various platforms to meet the needs of students. For example, Xiamen University has formed its own characteristics and the journalism practical teaching includes several layers.

- Practice-based within curriculum teaching;
- Project practice-based on innovation and entrepreneurship training;
- Practice on a campus media platform run by students under the guidance of teachers;
- Journalism practice project organized by university journalism department;
- Practice of news interview activities and techniques based on Marxist principles;
- Graduation internship (practice time 2-3 months).

Different practices have different task objectives and training objectives, and these form a network to cover all journalism students. Nearly half of the students get 3-4 types of practice opportunities, and the students who excel in these, get additional practice opportunities.
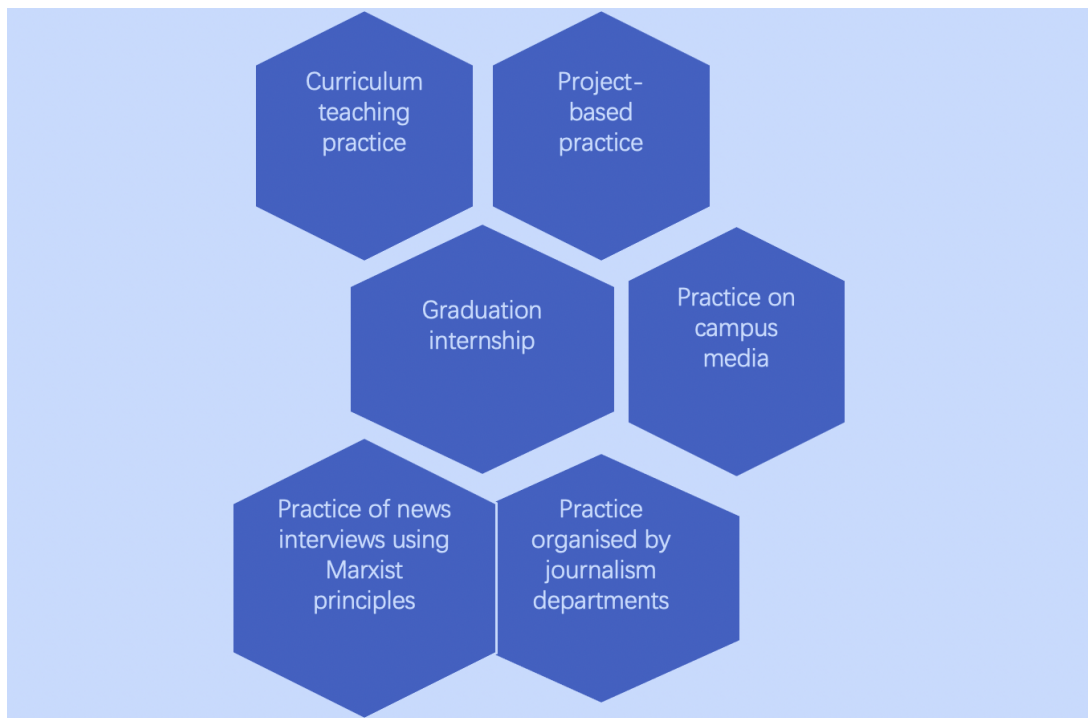
Figure 1: Basic types of journalism teaching practice in Xiamen University.

The following are two specific cases about campus media practice and innovation and entrepreneurship training practice.

The school's media platforms include the school news centre (radio, television, newspaper, Internet, microblog, WeChat official account, etc.). Journalism students are recruited but this is only offered to a small number as the press centre does not accommodate many students. Therefore, the media platforms under the guidance of teachers and independently operated by students are built. This has been found to be the most direct and effective way of training for journalism students.

The Phoenix Flower Video Club of Xiamen University is a learning and practice platform jointly built by teachers and students of Xiamen University. It was established in 2012, and mainly focuses on the production of video and photography works. Students can practice directing and screenwriting, film editing, photography and video production, lighting and sound special effects, colour mixing and music sound. The works created by the club are of high quality, some of which have been broadcast by CCTV, and the video for the enrolment of Xiamen University in 2019 has been well received (Xiamen University, 2019). In recent years, many works produced by students of the club have been selected for the Phoenix Flower Film Exhibition on Taiwan Straits. Some students majoring in radio and television directly submit film and television works as part of their graduation defence.

The government has invested a large amount of funds to encourage practical training in innovation and entrepreneurship for college students in recent years. The training has been carried out for several years. It is task-oriented and is carried out in a project-based way under the guidance of teachers. Teachers can submit their research projects to the project library, and students can apply

according to their interests. The projects selected by journalism students are usually related to professional practice and completed under the guidance of relevant teachers.

Two of the author's projects, for example, WeChat Public Account Cross-Strait Youth and Taiwan Youth Fujian Entrepreneurship Story Short Films Collection, were selected by students and guided by the author, with the basic tasks completed independently by the student team. In the first project, the student team operated WeChat public address, including making news and other content, also including communication and marketing. In the second project, the student team collected and produced documentary images of Taiwan youth entrepreneurs coming to mainland China. In undertaking these projects, students were able to practice their journalistic skills in interviewing, writing, shooting and editing.

More recently, the School of Journalism and Communication of Xiamen University has established a student journalism practice program with the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at Western Sydney University (WSU) in Australia, which organises student teams to study and practice their skills in other schools and with local media every year. The students from the Journalism School of Xiamen University went to Australia during their summer vacation to study and train at WSU for one week and then completed a media internship in Sydney. This cross institutional program has been successfully carried out for two years; in 2018 and 2019. It will resume when Australia opens its international borders.

Journalism in Australia: An overview

Similar to the realities of many developed and developing countries, journalism in Australia has developed as a craft where traditionally skills have been learned 'by doing' via on-the-job training. The late 20th and early 21st century has seen a remarkable shift in this approach with close to 30 universities across Australia teaching journalism programs. A technology-driven society means there is an even larger demand for training in professional skills before embarking on a journalism or other careers where journalistic attributes of effective communication using multiple skills such as ethical research, accuracy, balance, writing, managing, and delivering information succinctly and speedily to multimedia platforms are highly valued. Media organisations are no longer able to provide the skill sets or professional training to those who are required to hit the ground running, once employed as journalists or in professional practices of information management.

Burns (2018) argues that journalism is distinguished from other media activities by its ideology which is driven by the notion and ideal of service to the public interest. The 20th century professionalisation of journalism is reflected in the trend of tertiary training of prospective journalists and this has to include a combination of both knowledge about professional practice and rigorous skills development in order to become a professional practitioner.

Bacon (2000) argues that professionalisation of journalism has come through the 'institutionalisation' of its practice by way of organising middle class labour in an advanced capitalist economy. While emphasising that journalistic production

is reflected in the methodology of training, she says that this has placed emphasis on the social context and normative responsibilities and struggles of the intellectual worker.

The public's 'right to know' and 'freedom of the press': The 2019 AFP media raids

It is ironic that this study's Australian perspective on journalism in relation to how the profession has evolved and how journalists in training are prepared for the new realities of their profession and craft, is being written at a time when Australia's national broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) Sydney headquarters in Ultimo was raided by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) on June 5, 2019 seeking information on a 2017 report by the 'Four Corners' program called 'The Afghan Files' (ABC, 2017). The program was based on a leaked document, the AUSTEO (Australian Eyes Only) files, and related to the potential unlawful killing of unarmed men and children by Australian troops. This raid came a day after a similar raid on the Canberra home of News Corporation journalist Annika Smethurst who had written a 2018 story concerning top secret plans to expand surveillance of Australian citizens. In the same week, Sydney radio 2GB host Ben Fordham revealed that he had been contacted by the Department of Home Affairs regarding his reporting of 'highly confidential' information about asylum seeker vessels (*ABC News*, 2020). In response to the raids, ABC managing director David Anderson said it was 'highly unusual' for the national broadcaster to be raided in this way. He also labelled the raids as 'a serious development and [that raise] legitimate concerns over freedom of the press and proper public scrutiny of national security and defence matters' (*ABC News*, 2020).

In the context of education, it is important to bring such realities on the ground to the attention of journalism and media academics, as well as students, to highlight the deep cracks such interference causes to the 'will and determination' of journalists to present news in its rawest form, while adhering to the other important elements of news judgement, such as respect for privacy, ethics, balance and accuracy. According to Anderson, 'The ABC stands by its journalists, will protect its sources and continue to report without fear or favour on national security and intelligence issues when there is a clear public interest' (*ABC News*, 2020). Such realities require that students are trained in the areas of law as well as have a good understanding of the fundamental principles of journalism – the public's right to know and freedom of the press – so that they too can deliver news without fear or favour.

The Australian Federal Court later dismissed the ABC's challenge against the validity of the raid and ordered the ABC to pay costs, a decision which ABC's news director, Gaven Morris, described as 'really disappointing' and a blow to press freedom and the public's right to know (Karp, 2020). David Anderson noted that the ruling was further evidence of the urgent need for explicit protections for public interest journalism and for whistleblowers. The accuracy of the stories such as the Afghan Files had never actually been challenged and the AFP had used a provision of the Defence Act which made it a criminal offence to receive stolen Commonwealth property (Greste, 2020).

The federal president of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), Marcus Strom, said the decision was another blow to press freedom in Australia. He commented that 'the AFP raid on the ABC, and on the home of a News Corporation journalist the day before, are attacks on the public's right to know about what our governments do in our name' (Karp, 2020). Further, ABC chair, Ita Buttrose, challenged the nation's leaders' commitment to a transparent democracy.

> If our elected representatives in Canberra truly believe in Australia as a transparent democracy, it's time for them to show leadership and take action. Supporting media freedom doesn't mean making allowance for journalists to break the law – it means having laws that allow journalists to safely do reporting in the public interest (Karp, 2020).

In October 2020, after a lengthy delay, the charges against journalist Dan Oakes over the leaked classified documents were dropped by the Commonwealth Department of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) on the grounds that there was no public interest in pursuing a prosecution.

This incident in Australia, serves to illustrate that while the era of exponential growth in information technologies presents a myriad of opportunities, especially for journalism students, to publish and broadcast their works before they launch a career as media professionals, there are genuine personal and existential threats that can ruin their rapport or chances of a professional career if they are not educated in defamation and other laws related to journalism and the fields of communication where they are likely to be employed. The journalism program at Western Sydney University (WSU) takes this responsibility very seriously.

The journalism program at Western Sydney University

Canadian cultural theorist Marshall McLuhan's (1967, p. 12) take on the burgeoning information age that 'electrical information devices for universal, tyrannical womb-to-tomb surveillance are causing a very serious dilemma between our claim to privacy and the community's need to know', and thus provides an ideal springboard for discussions on some real challenges in journalism training and practice in Australia, specifically at WSU where a journalism major is offered in three degrees: Bachelor of Communication, Bachelor of Screen Media and Bachelor of Creative Industries. Students from other programs such as Law and Business, also study journalism units either as major units or as electives in a variety of double degree combinations.

The units (subjects of study) in the journalism program at WSU are designed with a clear focus on practical skills development, building on academic knowledge, while adhering to teaching the values of news, ethics, research, balance, public and community interest. Major considerations which arise from open opportunities in the new media environment and the age of the internet include: the importance of fact checking information; ensuring balance in reporting; adhering to the truth principals of journalism; verifying information

using authoritative sources; ensuring that the news meets society's need-to-know principles; protecting sources; and understanding how privacy, freedom of information, censorship and defamation laws work. Underpinning all these and various other skills and forms of knowledge development, is the employability and adaptability of students in a dynamic and shifting global work environment where Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and popularity of news is defined by the number of times these are viewed and shared, not necessarily the value of information it contains. The WSU journalism program thus focuses on developing students' storytelling abilities for multi-platform delivery with accuracy and speed.

Storytelling has been part of the human DNA since the time of cave paintings and bedtime stories. The value of this age-old cultural practice is advanced in each unit of study that WSU journalism students undertake, starting with the first-year foundation subject, 'Introduction to Journalism', where the diverse fields of journalism and new media are explored and which covers the concepts of news values and news research for target audiences. The unit looks at the role of the journalist and the professional skills of news gathering and writing. It also considers the legal and ethical obstacles and obligations faced by journalists operating in an environment of fast-paced communication. The methodologies underlying professional practice as well as delivering news with speed for multimedia platforms are central to this unit. After studying this unit, students are able to:

- Explain the importance of journalism in the modern world
- Understand the importance of audiences and medias when choosing news
- Explain the flow of information in creating news
- Ask questions and conduct interviews in a professional context
- Engage with the news and news environments for broadcast and published outcomes
- Apply skills gained for intellectual and professional insights.

Approaches to learning

The aim of this unit is to create a love for learning in journalism and an inclination to ask questions in order to develop curiosity and an inquiring mind. The approach to learning is creative, experiential and grounded in skills development, and pegged with the history of news theory and media ownership/development. Students learn by 'doing'. This mode of learning is advanced using the following teaching strategies:

- Professionally prepared and recorded lecture pods which present set learning modules for each week. Students must watch these before each week's class. Most of the learning takes places via the Intranet teaching site which is open to the students before the start and throughout the semester.
- Tutorials where students pitch ideas, consider risk mitigation, decide on target audiences and engage in news gathering, finding sources, interviewing and writing news.
- A requirement to develop a portfolio of research, writing and published works.

- A requirement to participate in an event to report news.
- An introduction to local editors for insights on news/newsrooms and opportunities to publish and broadcast.

These activities provide students with a deep and meaningful engagement with news and news values in order to develop story production skills and to understand the role and function of journalism.

After completing a generic set of introductory 'core' units, students generally choose their 'major' or specialisation by their second year. They are also required to study a core unit titled 'Media Law and Ethics' which advances specific knowledge of the law and the fields of ethics, especially in relation to communication. The journalism units they take up in second year focus on advancing research, writing, broadcasting and new media skills while providing a deeper level of understanding of news theory and the importance of journalism to a well-functioning, democratic society. The suite of units includes 'News Reporting' which focuses on developing radio, online and some broadcast skills; 'Feature Writing' which is designed to help advance research, interviewing, information management and writing skills, with accuracy, speed and to set targets in an ethical manner focusing on social issues; and 'Photojournalism' and Journalism Research and Investigation' which focus on advancing photography and research skills. Some learning activities in these units take place outside the classroom, at the national archives, in local communities such as refugee centres and local council premises where interviews take place at events and forums. Students get an opportunity to pitch their work for publishing in a variety of media platforms and also visit newsrooms for a real-life experience.

In third year, students study units including 'Digital Journalism' which focuses on video and radio news production, 'News Teams' where they work in groups to produce news copy for multimedia platforms and are assigned stories to cover, reflect on team dynamics and their own contributions to a collective news output; and the 'Internship' unit which requires them to work in industry for a minimum of 105 hours on supervised news production and develop a digital news portfolio with a personal brand on LinkedIn. Students also take units that focus on research methods, data, mediation and power, podcasting and building a personal brand, to name a few.

All these learning modules facilitate multiple modes of learning, including online (short 6-8 minutes) lecture pods, engagement with resources and updates provided via the WSU Intranet teaching platform vUWS, classroom research, pitching and writing activities including producing works in groups, and attending industry talks and forums by seasoned media producers and journalists. Some students get to cover international stories through programs such as Go Global and the Australian federal government initiated New Colombo Plan. All these opportunities provide a learning platform far removed from the Oxbridge model – based on the traditions of Oxford and Cambridge universities in England, using lectures and tutorials for theory and providing practical skills in workshops. Burns (2003) says that this was the dominant model used to teach journalism since such programs were introduced in tertiary education.

The WSU models and modes of teaching are based on the learning habits of the new generation of students who engage with new media in 24-hour cycles, similar to the news production and consumption cycles in a global media landscape (Flew, 2007). Students can engage with the learning materials and lecture pods in their own time and space using all forms of new media, including mostly smart phones. They come to class with a better understanding of what to expect, prepared to ask questions, and to learn and apply the concepts to produce stories in creative, new ways.

All the journalism units also offer online classes for those students who may not be able to physically attend a tutorial. All the units have been developed with adaptability in mind, providing students the opportunity to learn in their own time and space, return to the short lecture pods and other visual learning materials for reference and cross-checking, ask questions and conduct research, speaking to authoritative sources to validate angles and themes of their stories. This approach helps to advance the students' knowledge of journalism, local communities, socio-economic and political issues at the local, national and global levels as well as explore opportunities for publishing and broadcasting on diverse platforms with a global reach, including their own social media sites. In the process, they become independent learners and producers of work that meets industry and academic standards. This model of learning is creative and captures the heart of what journalism is about – developing independent thinking skills to research and present the 'five Ws and H' of news: Where, What, When, Why, Who and How. Students are given options to develop their individual and team skills in the processes of learning.

A few examples of such 'real' opportunities are:

- The association with News Local (News Corporation) media in the students' local communities for publishing their first story in 'Introduction to Journalism'. These are written by tapping their curiosity to 'spot' news, pitch the angle, research the background and finally write the story including a photo, and by using authoritative primary and secondary sources.
- Publishing stories on local refugee communities in the Communities in Cultural Transition (CiCT) Magazine. Students in 'Feature Writing' work on this and a local project with the Anglicare Nursing Home in Blacktown, to record stories on senior residents (audio, written and video narratives).
- The opportunity for students in 'News Teams' to work on a Blacktown Memories project with the local council's library on Oral Histories. These stories are recorded on video, written as short narratives and with a full transcription that is provided with the video link to the story on the Council's website.
- The opportunity for all students to cover Australian federal elections: in 2016 and 2019 specific electorates were allocated to WSU. Students, including those in first year, published their works, written as assessments. In 2019, of the eleven published works, two were from 'Introduction to Journalism', eight from 'Feature Writing' and one from 'Digital Journalism'.
- All students are encouraged to first identify their audience (a publishing and broadcasting platform) when they pitch their story ideas to their tutor who scrutinises their proposals in class. As a result, many students get their works published in a diverse range of media, including global media.

- Students are expected to scan the global environment to find relevant and authoritative sources for their stories. Many students have interviewed government ministers, former prime minister Julia Gillard, scientists, international voices on crime, refugee and social issues, to name a few.

In recent years, teaching digital technologies has revolutionised news delivery. Journalists in every area of the profession now require video, audio, online and print skills to work across multiple platforms and contexts to develop social capital (Putnam, 2000; Halper, 2005). The 'News Reporting' unit introduces students to multiplatform digital journalism and the ways in which multiple media can be used to tell stories for a range of contexts. Students develop their own blog site that is populated using digital devices for working with video, audio and text to engage with a range of social media storytelling modes to extend stories across multiple media contexts. Based on an understanding of ethical and informed journalism practices, students are encouraged to develop their own voice as an independent thinker and writer into the public domain of online publishing.

The other popular third year unit, 'News Teams', introduces students to the concept surrounding the editorial team process and the culture of the newsroom across all news media. It explores the social and organisational context of news production in commercial, public or community news organisations and draws upon theory from communication, sociology, psychology, and management to provide a broad understanding of the principles and practices of effective and creative news teams. It critically analyses the structures, processes and techniques of news gathering to enable quality team outcomes and encourages collaborative working relationships and develops students' own practice in a team.

Students work in groups on set newsroom projects such as the Blacktown Memories project and reporting on the Refugee Communities. They are divided into teams of four to six to produce stories for multimedia platforms using four main themes. All the stories they produce in the unit become part of their team portfolio. They produce individual reports on the team formation, their own roles, what worked and where they failed, with solutions, what they would change, how and why. They learn to understand news as 'the outcome of a process in which decisions must be made to funnel many news events down to a few' (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 19).

This section has provided a brief overview on how journalism is taught at WSU and explains why the changes and new models have been introduced. The most important consideration for the changes has been the evolving learning habits of the new age students, with adaptability and flexibility in learning materials and teaching approaches as key factors. The relevance of these changes was put to the test during the COVID-19 lockdown. The online learning modules enabled a smooth transition to fully online delivery of the journalism units. The biggest adjustments were in the digital units where there was no access to on campus studios and broadcast quality production equipment. Our students were agile and adaptable, quickly learning to make the most of their own handheld mobile

devices such as smart phones. Many shared photos and video footage on intranet teaching sites so that others could use these in their stories. We witnessed teamwork and collaboration at their best.

The pandemic put us 'all in it together,' challenging the concepts of objectivity in journalism, reporting on society and the crisis. No one was an impartial or (objective observer) according to Bourdieu (1977); students had previously been told not to interview family and friends for stories. During the pandemic we changed our approach and said interview family and friends, for they would be able to share experiences; use social media to connect with people across the globe to gain insights and deeper perspective, when researching and writing stories. Many students used zoom to conduct interviews and record these as evidence of their research. Yet others brought global news into their stories by connecting with families and friends overseas, some interviewed grandparents who lived through other pandemics and global crises; amplifying subjectivity and redrawing the boundaries of journalism fields in the new normal.

A comparison of the two approaches

While the media environment in China and Australia may appear as different as chalk and cheese, there are several fundamental key similarities in approaches to teaching and learning of journalism, an important craft that defines the 'health' of a society and country. Both the Chinese and Australian programs are working on a common platform to develop inquiring minds and to teach skills that enhance students' capabilities to become well rounded, professional practitioners in a complex, disruptive, chaotic and diverse media environment.

The challenges facing journalism in China may be the need to keep up with new technologies as they impact on traditional news production approaches. In the internet era, the ability of traditional media to support social mobilisation is weakened. Additionally, the rise of 'we media' leads to a requirement to bridge the tension between 'official' sources of news and opinion and that of broader public opinion as it is disseminated on new social media platforms.

In Australia, as seen from the example of the ABC newsroom raids, there is an increasing inclination for governments to want to censor and control access to and use of information, sometimes in discreet ways, particularly if it portrays government in a poor light. This can become intimidating, especially for young journalists trying to establish a career in the profession.

Traditionally for much of its history in Australia, journalism was considered a craft or trade, attracting people straight out of school, rather than those with university educations. Would-be journalists started as copy boys or girls via in-house training before commencing a three or four-year cadetship. Senior journalists would take these cadets under their wings and teach the required skills as they worked and produced news copy. Such training included interview skills, note-taking (with shorthand often a compulsory requirement), how to structure stories using the inverted pyramid and 5Ws and H approaches, spelling, grammar and layout. Training in ethics and media law was provided through 'on the job' and as the cadets handled more complex stories that required legal competencies. At the end of their cadetship, they would become 'graded' journalists. With university training in all aspects of news gathering,

researching, interviewing, fact checking for accuracy and balance, writing, presenting and broadcasting, combined with training in media law and ethics, the students are prepared to launch into careers as journalists or media producers upon graduation. Their biggest hurdle today is the challenging spaces in which they are expected to work to produce good journalism, without fear or favour.

Conclusion: The globalisation of news and exposure of young minds?

This paper has explored how journalism programs in two very different countries are training and giving students an experience of newsrooms in a variety of contexts, through assessments designed for publishing and broadcasting output, work experience and internships locally and through other international opportunities. Some of the Xiamen student have attended an extended internship with the *People's Daily Online* in Sydney as well as auditing and participating in journalism and media classes at WSU. WSU students on the other hand have similar experiences through Australian Government's New Colombo Plan (NCP). Upon graduation, journalism and media students at WSU are well prepared for work realities and have adaptable attributes to successfully transition into global work environments. What they learn in the programs presents a creative universe which offers news from bite size to long form journalism, from 30 second news grabs to 2-5 minutes of broadcasting as a featured documentary, turned into a YouTube clip for sharing across multiple platforms, including their own social media sites. While both programs aim to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to become effective communicators and media professionals with a universal understanding of journalism practice and its role in society; while also understanding how the media and entertainment industries operate; both face similar challenges of providing a robust environment to work in. There is a point, however, where communism and capitalism meet to create a new and exciting learning platform for curious minds to develop new capabilities as producers and distributors of news and information that the public has a right to know, in creative and engaging ways.

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